

The tin mines of the Waterberg (Transvaal), 1905-1914

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INTRODUCTION

THIS ARTICLE IS part of a larger effort to try to determine the impact of industrialization in the Waterberg region of the Transvaal in the period 1905 to 1914.¹ The emphasis is mainly on Rooiberg, some 60 km west of Warmbaths.

Industrialization (certainly on any measurable scale) began in the Waterberg with the discovery of tin at Rooiberg in approximately 1905. Further discoveries of tin at Zaaipplaats, 35 km west of Potgietersrus and at Union Tin (formerly South African Tin Mines) 35 km west of Naboomspruit, at about the same time, signalled the start of a tin mining industry which has existed to the present day.²

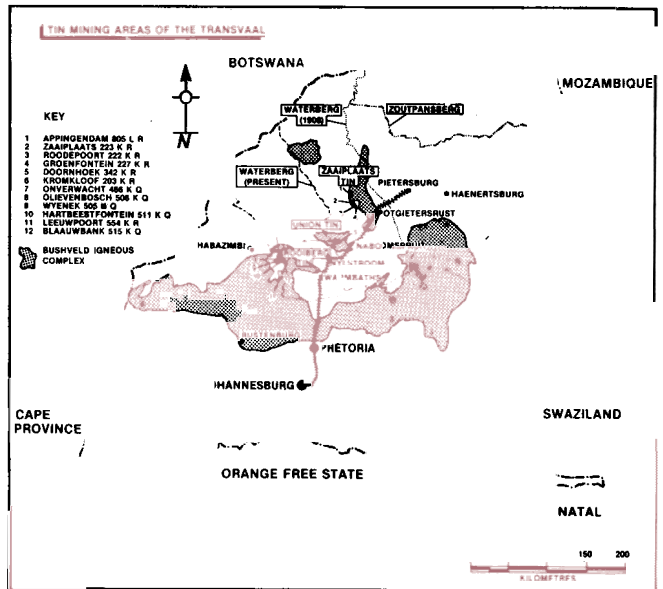
The tin deposits in the Waterberg are small. The Transvaal currently produces about 2% of the world's tin. In the period approximately 1908 to 1914, the figure was nearer 3% but still small.³ However, tin is the rarest of the base metals and it occurs only sparingly around the world. There are only three parts per million in the earth's crust, compared with 70 parts per million for copper and 80 for zinc.⁴ Any source is therefore significant.

Tin is one of the vital minerals of modern industry because of its particular qualities. It is durable, malleable and non-toxic, and the enormous difference between its melting and boiling points (231°C to 2 270°C) makes it particularly useful as a coating or alloy with other metals.⁵ Its non-toxicity also means that tin can be used in contact with food and drink. At the turn of the century there was a demand for tin for the consumer durable goods industry, especially the tin can. By far the largest consumer of tin for this purpose in the 1900s was Britain. American consumption also started to increase at this time, and there was competition for available supplies.⁶ This, and the resultant rising prices for tin (between 1904 and 1906, the average price of tin rose from £126 to £181 per ton)⁷ precipitated interest in finding new sources of tin around the world.

It seems significant that tin was discovered in the Transvaal at about this time, and that the discoveries appeared to be the result of private as well as government effort, both of which had British connections. In the Rooiberg area, a British company, Oceana Consolidated, owned the land and had prospectors at work in 1905,⁸ and government-sponsored geological surveys were taking place under the British crown colony administration.⁹

THE REGION AND ITS INHABITANTS

In the early 1900s the Waterberg region was a much neglected and sparsely populated part of the Transvaal. The area was vast, remote, inaccessible and largely unexplored. Permanent white settlement of the area was evident from at least the 1850s when, for example, the farm Leeuwpoot, part of the Rooiberg complex, was registered in 1859.¹⁰ Registered in the same year, was the farm Kromkloof, near what later became the Union Tin mine.¹¹ When the owner of Kromkloof, a Voortrekker named Nicholas van Heerden, reached that part of the Waterberg in 1859, his farm was the limit of white settlement. There were apparently no whites living further north. Fifty years later when mining had started in the area and Afrikaans poet and author Eugène Marais went to work there, he estimated the total white population to be about 105.¹²



In the Rooiberg area, the farms Welgevonden, Hartebeestefontein, Blaauwbank, Nieuwpoot, Onverwacht, Olievenbosch and Nooitgedacht (all of which became part of the tin mining complex) had been registered by 1867. The tin-bearing farm Groenfontein in the Zaaipplaats area, was also registered in that year. The foundations of the future

NB: All published company reports are located in the Johannesburg Public Library. Other unpublished records (e.g. weekly and annual reports) are stored at Rooiberg mine itself.

¹ G. Natrass, 'Tin mining in the Transvaal 1905 to 1914' (M.A., Unisa, 1988).

² However, see *Gold Fields of South Africa Limited, 54th annual report*, 1986, p. 13, which indicates that although Rooiberg and Zaaipplaats are still operational, Union Tin ceased operations on 31 March 1986, following the collapse of the world tin price. The plant has, however, been put on care and maintenance until the market price picks up again.

³ For tables of tin production, see Natrass, 'Tin mining in the Transvaal', p. 2. The largest deposits of tin are in the Malay States, which currently contribute some 65% of the world's supply.

⁴ L. Falcon, 'Tin in South Africa', *Journal of the South African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy* 85, October 1985, p. 335.

⁵ Anon., 'A guide to tin', *International Tin Research Institute* (Publication No. 540, no date), p. 13.

⁶ *Zoutpansberg Review*, 7.3.1911.

⁷ *Metal Bulletin Handbook*, 1969, p. 199.

⁸ Oceana, Consolidated Company Limited, *Report of Fifth Ordinary General Meeting of the Shareholders* (henceforth Oceana, Fifth Meeting), 20.12.1901.

⁹ Transvaal Archives Depot, Pretoria (TAD), Director of Geological Survey (DGS) 316: Geological Survey, 1901-1905. Introduction. Also TAD, Transvaal Publications (TKP) 223 and 280: Transvaal Mines Department, Reports of Geological Surveys, 1904-1905.

¹⁰ Johannesburg Public Library (JPL), Strange Library of Africana, S. Store 96P.248T: List of farms in the Rustenburg and Waterberg areas.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² L. Rousseau, *The dark stream: the story of Eugène N. Marais* (Johannesburg, 1982), p. 201.

towns Pietpotgietersrus (Potgietersrus), Naboomspruit, Nylstroom and Warmbaths, near the future tin mining areas, were evident by the late 1860s.¹³ In 1866 the Waterberg was declared an independent district — it had previously been part of the districts of Zoutpansberg and Pretoria — and a landdrost was chosen for the new district.¹⁴

The boundaries of the Waterberg district were to be drawn and redrawn several times before the end of the century¹⁵ and the impression is that white people were thinly distributed over a vast area. The 'middle veld' environment of most parts of the Waterberg was regarded as suitable for cattle and ostrich ranching and for growing a variety of vegetables and products such as maize, tobacco, millet, sorghum, oats, barley, wheat, potatoes and all kinds of citrus fruits. However, it is not clear how extensively some of these products were actually farmed before 1913,¹⁶ when capitalist farming enterprises by companies like Oceana were evident in the area.

White settlers also hunted — old farm names like Leeuwoort, Hartebeestfontein, Olifantsklip and Rhenosterfontein are testimony to the fact that game was once common in the Waterberg. Eugène Marais described a lucrative trade in ivory in the Naboomspruit area,¹⁷ while the gold-mining magnate Abe Bailey, later a director of Leeuwoort mine adjoining Rooiberg, had a hunting lodge at Leeuwoort. Clearly tin mining company officials used offers to hunt on company farms as an incentive to prospective employees at the tin mining centres.¹⁸

The black population of the Waterberg was apparently not large either. Indigenous people in the area would have included Tswana, Transvaal Ndebele, Venda and Pedi (northern Sotho),¹⁹ but tin mining company records do not identify the 'natives' who occupied their farms, or the 'boys' or 'kaffir tickets' who worked on their mines,²⁰ beyond some references to 'Bechuana'. These might have been the local Tswana (although the label was often loosely applied to any blacks in the interior),²¹ or to Tswana recruited from across the border in British Bechuanaland.²² In the Rooiberg area the mines were probably served by the Kgafela Kgatla (eastern Tswana), living near the junction of the Aapies and Crocodile rivers.²³ There is, however, no clear evidence to substantiate this. The fact that the mines had to resort to recruiting labour from Bechuanaland, even though their needs were modest when compared to the gold mines on the Witwatersrand, also suggests that the area was

only sparsely populated by blacks. Alternatively, it may have meant that blacks did not need to work for wages at that time, an issue which receives further attention later.

Apart from white and black farmers, there were some prospectors in the area, as is evident from the records of gold finds and the demand for a gold commissioner in the 1870s. After 1875, this official became known as the mining commissioner; he was also the Pietersburg magistrate and his area of jurisdiction embraced the districts of Waterberg, Zoutpansberg, Potgietersrus and Pietersburg, a vast and mostly unexplored area of nearly 60 000 square miles (153 600 sq. km).²⁴ The base mineral potential of the Waterberg was apparently not initially suspected, but from at least the early 1880s, applications to prospect for tin, copper and other minerals — apart from gold — started to appear.²⁵ The varied mineral potential of the Waterberg was thus clearly anticipated, but the vastness, remoteness and inaccessibility of the area apparently discouraged pros-

¹³ TAD, Landdrost Waterberg (T) 34: Inleiding, pp. 172-175.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.* See also Cape Archives Depot (CAD), Department of Justice (JUS) 527 6420/29: Proclamation No. 163 of 1916. Rooiberg was in fact part of the Rustenburg district until this time but it seems that boundaries were not clearly defined because Rooiberg was generally referred to in company records as being in the Waterberg district.

¹⁶ *Zoutpansberg Review*, 10.4.1908. Also Oceana, *Sixteenth Report of Directors and Accounts* (henceforth Oceana, *Sixteenth Report*), 30.6.1916 (including 'Report on farming in the Transvaal, 1913').

¹⁷ Rousseau, *The dark stream*, p. 300.

¹⁸ *Zoutpansberg Review*, 14.8.1906 and 25.4.1913.

¹⁹ I. Schapera, *The Tswana* (Ethnographic Survey of Africa, Southern Africa, III, Series) (London, 1976); also N.J. van Warmelo, *A preliminary survey of the Bantu tribes of Southern Africa* (Pretoria, 1935), maps 17-19.

²⁰ Anglo-French Land, Special Report on farm Groenfontein, district Waterberg, 4.6.1899; see also the weekly reports at Rooiberg mine: Jameson (manager Hartebeestfontein) — Manager, London and South Africa Agency (Johannesburg), 15.3.1906 and 17.5.1906.

²¹ P. Maylam, *A history of the African people of South Africa: from the early Iron Age to the 1970s* (Cape Town, 1986), p. 44; also Van Warmelo, *Preliminary survey of the Bantu tribes*, p. 103.

²² Rooiberg Minerals Development Company Limited (henceforth RMDC), Half-yearly report at Rooiberg, 30.6.1913.

²³ Transvaal Native Affairs Department, *Short history of the native tribes of the Transvaal* (Pretoria, 1905), p. 27. See also Schapera, *The Tswana*, pp. 15 and 81.

²⁴ TAD, T34, pp. 172-175.

²⁵ TAD, Argief van die Staatsekretaris Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (SS) OR 11177/88, 01/R3376/59, OR801/94 and 2501/94, all refer to applications to prospect for tin.

The Leeuwoort Tin Mines (early 20th century).

PHOTOGRAPH: From *Mining and Industrial Magazine of Southern Africa*, December 1930.



pecting on a large scale. Such prospecting expeditions as there were, took place only seasonally, usually in winter, before the rigours of summer heat, rain and the risk of fever.²⁶

Difficulties of identifying tin deposits must also have mitigated against success. Tin deposits are notoriously difficult to recognize because the tin does not occur naturally in metallic form. It has to be extracted from other minerals, for example cassiterite (tin oxide), the most common form of Transvaal tin deposits. This cassiterite, in turn, is usually located in a complex network of lodes, fissures and pipes, mostly without pattern and usually quite deep. Unlike gold there is no reef to follow and locating payable tin deposits is largely an exercise in geological interpretation. The comment is still heard in mining circles that the best tin miners are those who can smell out tin.²⁷ Not surprisingly, after the discovery of the main Witwatersrand gold reef in 1886, interest focused on the Rand for the next two decades, and the more remote Waterberg was only erratically prospected until approximately 1905.

The area did, however, attract capitalist interest prior to that date in that Johannesburg-based companies which had been established in the wake of the gold discoveries, began to look further north and to speculate on land. The Waterberg was a prime focus in this regard.

CAPITALIST PENETRATION OF THE WATERBERG

Some of the companies which invested in the Waterberg before the end of the 19th century were the Oceana Transvaal Land Company Limited, Anglo-French Land Company of the Transvaal Limited and African Farms Limited. Their reasons were generally similar. Sometimes noble sentiments were expressed — for example that investment in the remote north was 'to promote great forward movements', 'open up the dark continent' and 'extend the power and influence of the (home) country'.²⁸ However, a more realistic explanation was that they were looking for useful outlets for their capital and the 'still largely unexplored' and 'potentially rich' district of the Waterberg seemed a good prospect.²⁹ Land away from the Witwatersrand was 'little known or explored and therefore cheap' and it was anticipated that in such a proven mineral rich province as the Transvaal, the land would surely appreciate even if this was only in the long term. It was also felt that there was always the chance that the land itself might contain mineral wealth.³⁰ In 1886 the company Oceana bought 225 farms in outlying districts of the Transvaal: 127 of these farms were in the Waterberg and they were purchased for one shilling an acre.³¹ which was generally regarded as far less than the land was worth. The land was also deliberately reflected as low in value in the company's balance sheets as a tax dodge.³²

Later, when tin was discovered on some of these farms, separate tin mining companies were established to exploit the tin, and they were administered by the original land companies. Hence, when tin was discovered on the farms Hartebeestfontein and Olievenbosch, belonging to Oceana, in 1905 the separate company Rooiberg Mineral Development Company (henceforth RMDC) was established, administered by Oceana and later by the Anglo-French Exploration Company, (henceforth Anglo-French) which bought the major shareholding in Oceana in 1910.³³

In the interim period, companies like Oceana took steps to open up the area and to attract settlers to their farms. In 1898 Oceana entered an agreement with the Transvaal republican government for the building of a railway line between Pretoria and Pietersburg, with extensions to Warmbaths, Naboomspruit and Potgietersrus (see map), to make

the areas where the company owned land more accessible. It was apparent that Oceana had taken the initiative in the scheme — and that they had provided most of the capital (some £300 000).³⁴ It was also apparent that the opening up of this railway line facilitated prospecting operations.³⁵ The line was completed during the period of the British crown colony administration³⁶ and it seems significant that the first government-sponsored systematic geological surveys of the outlying areas were started at this time.³⁷

The land companies also had schemes to attract new settlers. Farms were leased on what were described as 'very reasonable terms', often on the share system and frequently with the option to purchase.³⁸ However, progress in this regard was slow until 1907, when company records indicated the profitable sale of some of their farms to new settlers with access to Land Bank loans.³⁹ It was also at about this time that some companies noted increased revenue from rentals as tenants on their farms became more able to pay.⁴⁰

There were also company-sponsored schemes to encourage and improve agriculturè. In 1905, for example, Oceana reported that the work of agricultural development on company farms was proceeding under the supervision of Abe Bailey.⁴¹ The report added that experimental planting had taken place on some of the company's farms and that steps had been taken in conjunction with other land companies for the reorganization and better supervision of farms.⁴² The availability of credit during the boom period from 1907 to 1913 led to rising land prices, which enabled companies to sell some of their farms at considerable profit. In addition, tin discoveries had introduced a different use for the land in certain areas. Despite these factors, the companies still retained large areas of first-class farming land which they began to farm more profitably after Union, and which led to capitalist farming enterprises. The middle-veld environment of the Waterberg was regarded as 'some of the finest ranching country in the world' and when the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 brought shortages in the world's beef supply, there were profits to be made from stock farming in the Waterberg.⁴³ Growers of fruit in the Waterberg also had a special advantage on the export market as

²⁶ *Zoutpansberg Review*, 8.3.1907.

²⁷ H. Fridjohn, 'Rooiberg Tin. Watch those fractures', *Financial Mail*, 16, April-June 1965. Also interview with R. Stewart, geologist Rooiberg, June 1982.

²⁸ Oceana, *Second Meeting*, 20.12.1898, p. 12.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6 and 12.

³⁰ *Ibid.* Also Oceana, *Eighteenth Meeting*, 31.10.1913.

³¹ Annex to Oceana, *First Report*, 30.6.1898, p. 6.

³² This aspect is more fully explored in Natrass, 'Tin mining in the Transvaal', Chapter 2.

³³ Anglo-French, *Twelfth Meeting*, 30.9.1910.

³⁴ Oceana, *Second Meeting*, 20.12.1898, p. 6; also Oceana, *Fifth Meeting*, 20.12.1901.

³⁵ Oceana, *First Report*, 30.6.1898, p. 4.

³⁶ Oceana, *Fourth Meeting*, 30.12.1900, p. 3; also Oceana, *Fifth Meeting*, 20.12.1901, p. 4.

³⁷ TAD, DGS 316: Geological Survey, 1901-1905; also TAD, TKP 223 and 280: Transvaal Mines Department, Reports of Geological Survey 5, 1904.

³⁸ Transvaal Consolidated Land and Exploration Company Limited, *Thirteenth Annual Report* (henceforth TCL, *Thirteenth Annual Report*), 31.12.1907, p. 14. See also Oceana, *Eighteenth Meeting*, 31.12.1913, p. 4.

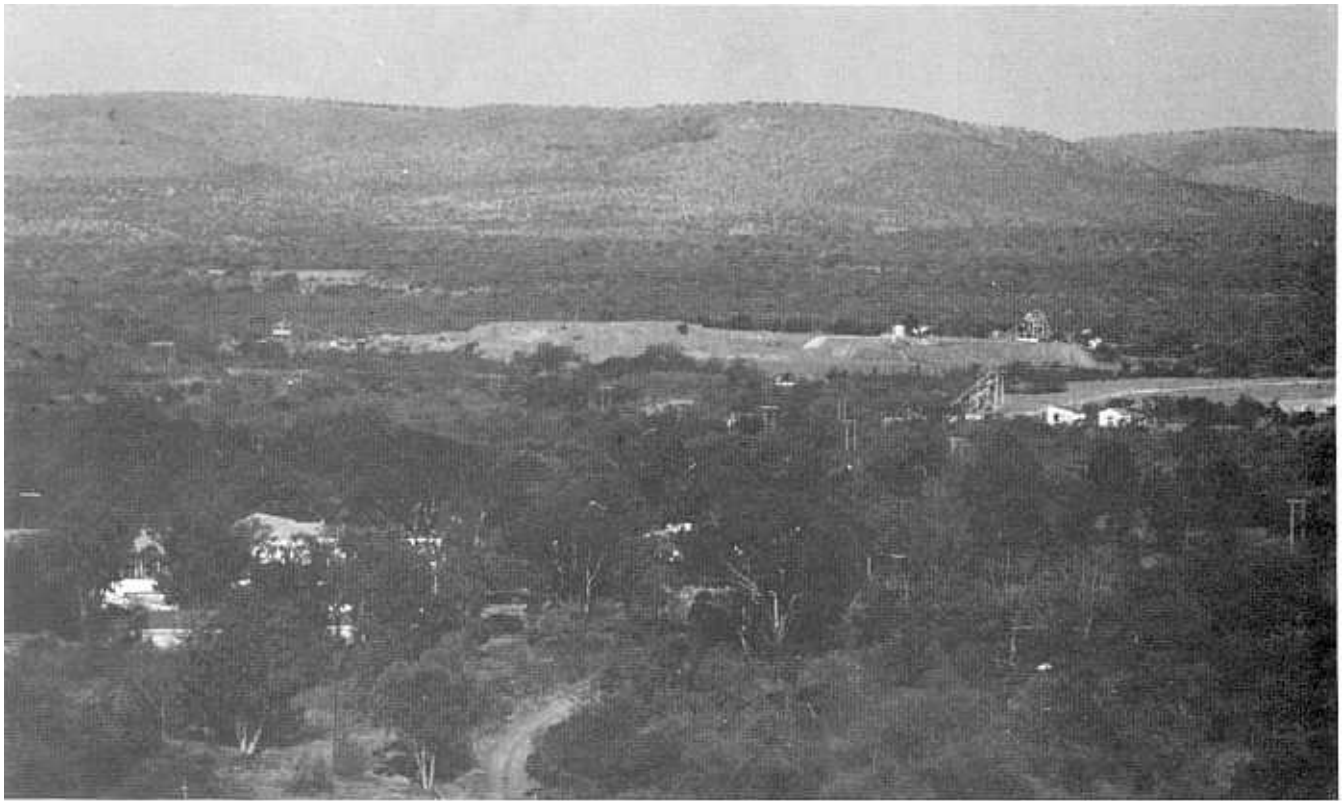
³⁹ TCL, *Thirteenth Annual Report*, 31.12.1907, p. 14. Also Oceana, *Eighteenth Meeting*, 31.12.1913, p. 4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Oceana, *Eighth Report and Account*, 30.6.1905; also African Farms, *First Annual Report*, 31.12.1902, p. 3.

⁴² Oceana, *Eighth Report*, 30.6.1905.

⁴³ TCL, *Twenty First Annual Report*, 31.12.1915.



Aerial view of Rooiberg.

PHOTOGRAPH: ANDREW LANHAM (BY COURTESY GOLD FIELDS OF SOUTH AFRICA LTD.)

they could sell their produce to Europe during the last months of August and September when supplies from other sources were not available.⁴⁴

As well as encouragement to farming, the companies also encouraged prospecting on company land, tributing and other incentive schemes to finders of minerals were offered.⁴⁵ Significantly too, even when farms were sold to new settlers, the original land companies retained the mineral rights to those farms.⁴⁶

When tin was discovered in the Rooiberg area in approximately 1905 it seemed to be the result of the combined efforts of government geologist, A.L. Hall, who had spent some two years surveying bushveld areas, and prospectors attached or sponsored in some way by Oceana. Hall and his team had noticed old workings at Rooiberg (these workings have been dated to approximately 1500 AD and 1700 AD).⁴⁷ But at first they were passed over as 'worthless iron and copper deposits', tin being difficult to identify, as previously mentioned. Hall suspected the presence of tin but admitted that on the subject of tin and in a country where it had received little attention, much had to be learnt, and local experience was necessary.⁴⁸ It was only after traces of tin were found in the old dumps and more systematic investigations were carried out, that the parent bodies were located.⁴⁹

It was probably Oceana prospectors who made the crucial discoveries because they had the 'local experience' alluded to by Hall. In a report of June 1905, it was recorded that tin had been found by Oceana company prospectors under the direction of Oceana consulting engineers,⁵⁰ but the names of the prospectors were not stated, and their exact relationship with the company cannot be concluded.

The discovery of tin and the start of mining operations hastened and increased white settlement of the area. The separate companies which were started to exploit the tin, experienced the typical difficulties of mining in a remote area: there were no facilities nor a mobilized labour force, while a sizeable item in the cost budgets of the various com-

panies would have been the need to supply these facilities. It does not seem as if much help was forthcoming from the various governments in the period approximately 1905 to 1914, and it was largely left to the companies themselves to solve their own problems. The newly formed Rooiberg company complained of government tardiness in building roads to link the mines with the nearest towns in 1908 and again in 1912,⁵¹ and the evidence suggests that the companies mostly built and financed their own access roads and dams.

There were problems, too, with labour. This was not just because enough labour was not always forthcoming, but also because labour needs fluctuated according to changing fortunes on the mines. Apart from being difficult to recognize, tin also occurs erratically. Sometimes apparently well-defined and rich lodes disappear after a few feet of working, and on the other hand, some barren pipes suddenly become productive at deeper levels. There are thus good times when rich lodes are being worked and extra labour is needed, and bad times when the tin appears to be finished in certain sections of the mine, and labour has to be retrenched. This unpredictable factor accounts for the fact that the total number of workers varied enormously at Rooiberg, from approximately 180 to 800 at particular times.⁵²

⁴⁴ *Zoutpansberg Review*, 2.9.1914.

⁴⁵ Oceana, *Eighth Meeting*, 20.12.1904.

⁴⁶ Oceana, *Eighteenth Meeting*, 31.10.1913, p. 4.

⁴⁷ H.M. Friede, 'Iron Age mining in the Transvaal', *Journal of the South African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy*, April 1980, p. 156.

⁴⁸ TAD, TKP 223 (ii): Transvaal Mines Department, Geological Survey for 1904, p. 58.

⁴⁹ Friede, 'Iron Age mining in the Transvaal', p. 160.

⁵⁰ Oceana, *Eighth Annual Report*, 30.6.1905, p. 4.

⁵¹ See for example RMDC, Weekly report of Manager (Schoch) to Consulting Engineer (Way), 19.10.1912; also TAD, Secretary of Mines (MM) 180, 2305/07: Petition of Manager RMDC to Inspector of Mines, 29.10.1908.

⁵² For example, RMDC, *Report of Directors and Accounts*, 30.6.1910, indicates that numbers of blacks employed rose from 149 to 602 between July 1909 and June 1910 because of changing circumstances on the mine.

LABOUR SUPPLY AND CONDITIONS

Like the gold mines, the tin mines needed both skilled and unskilled labour. In a society still largely pre-mechanized, the start of a new mine required manual labour to perform the arduous task of stripping the overburden to expose the ore bodies. This was followed by the equally menial tasks of trenching, timbering, hammering (drilling), shovelling and sweeping. Sufficient labour for these purposes was not forthcoming, even though the needs of the tin mines were modest when compared to the gold mines of the Witwatersrand. The building of the railway line from Pretoria to Pietersburg, with branch lines to places like Warmbaths (near Rooiberg), had had the effect of opening up the Waterberg and making the area more accessible. But it had also facilitated the movement of blacks to the Witwatersrand,⁵³ thus depleting the area of labour which could have been employed on the tin mines.

It was thus evident that large numbers of blacks in the Rooiberg area had access to land without much supervision or control. They therefore had little need to work for wages. It seems that companies occasionally took action against black squatters on company land; there was some collection of taxes which necessitated recourse to wage-earning in some cases,⁵⁴ but blacks residing on crown land were left alone. In 1905 African Farms — which owned land in the Rooiberg area — complained that their shortages of labour were largely due to the fact that there were 'vast tracts of land owned by individuals, companies and especially the government, which continued to accommodate thousands of natives... (and that)... the rent for this land was only collected to a small extent and easily evaded'.⁵⁵

Another problem was the proximity of the tin mines to the rural homes of the blacks. In the case of peripheral mining areas, capital had gone to labour, rather than the other way around.⁵⁶ Instead of being an advantage for the mining companies, the proximity of the work place to the rural home made it too easy for blacks to return home or desert, and the mines' black labour force was subject to the seasonal demands of the agricultural lifestyle. At certain times of the year, usually from October to March, blacks returned home to plough, plant or harvest, and the tin mining companies recorded labour shortages at this time.⁵⁷

The needs of individual chiefs in particular areas also affected the supply of labour. Representatives of the Rooiberg company regularly negotiated with 'local chiefs and headmen', but with only varying degrees of success. Sometimes 'runners' or agents were sent as far afield as Bechuanaland or Basutoland to look for labour, and again these efforts were only sometimes successful. On one occasion the compound manager at Rooiberg went himself to Basutoland and found 50 black men presumably from an area where there was economic need.⁵⁸ However, on another occasion, when black wages were reduced at Leeuwpoot, 120 workers all from the Mangwato tribe of the Bechuanaland protectorate decided to leave rather than accept the reduced rate, presumably because their need was not as great.⁵⁹

The tin mining companies also experienced difficulties finding and keeping a sufficient supply of skilled labour. The identification, mining and metallurgy of tin is known to be particularly difficult and skilled labour was needed for geological interpretation and the selection of sites, shaft sinking (multiple hoists were usually needed because of the erratic nature of tin occurrences), and various other mining, metallurgical, engineering and construction work. There was no local skilled labour force, and skills had to be recruited from elsewhere. A skilled miner earned £35 a month at Rooiberg in 1906, compared to approximately £22 a month on



Rooiberg Tin Mines, A7 shaft, 1985.

PHOTOGRAPH: ANDREW LANHAM (BY COURTESY GOLD FIELDS OF SOUTH AFRICA LTD.)

the Witwatersrand. The remote locality of tin mines like Rooiberg necessitated that higher wages and other incentive schemes like tributing arrangements, finders' bonuses and the naming of work places after the people who found them, were offered to attract skilled labour to go there.⁶⁰

The white employment register still in existence at Rooiberg indicates that between the official registration of the RMDC company in May 1908 and December 1914, some 227 whites were employed at Rooiberg. They had all come from elsewhere: some 213 were British (probably mostly South African British although this is not specified), and there were also a few Russians, Americans, Italians, Australians, Greeks, Swiss, Swedish and Canadians.⁶¹ Some of the British were, not surprisingly, from the tin mining areas of Cornwall. Specialist Cornish tin dressers were particularly sought after. One of them, S. Harris, chose to remain at Rooiberg and three generations of his family have since lived and worked there.⁶²

Mostly the white immigrants were single men who remained for only brief periods of time. This may have been partly due to the erratic nature of tin occurrences. At Rooiberg, for example, of the 36 men employed between 8 April and 17 October 1912, 15 had been retrenched within the next three to six years. No reasons were given but it seems likely that this had to do with changing fortunes on the mine. This coming and going of a heterogeneous group of immigrant whites, although not on a large scale (Rooiberg did not appear to have any more than 70 white employees at a time) nonetheless contributed to changing population patterns and the accumulation of skills in the Waterberg.

The particular regionalism of the Waterberg also necessitated a third category of workers: those with rural skills. In the absence of other facilities, transport riders transported men, machinery, ore and other goods around the mines and to and from the nearest rail links. These services were performed by local Boers who appeared to work under separate

⁵³ Oceana, *Fifth Meeting*, 20.12.1901, p. 5.

⁵⁴ Oceana, *Fourth Report*, 30.6.1901.

⁵⁵ African Farms, *Fourth Report*, 31.12.1905, p. 20.

⁵⁶ J. Crush, 'Tin mining in the Valley of Heaven' (unpublished African Studies Institute seminar paper delivered at the University of the Witwatersrand, 9 March 1987), p. 2.

⁵⁷ See for example RMDC, Weekly report of Manager (Schoch) to Consulting Engineer (Way), 26.10.1912.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*: Schoch — Way, 10.2.1914.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*: Schoch — Way, 25.8.1914.

⁶⁰ *Zoutpansberg Review*, 14.5.1907.

⁶¹ RMDC, Employment register at Rooiberg, pp. 2-11.

⁶² Personal interview with Edna May White (grand-daughter of S. Harris), Warmbaths, 1981.

contract, because their names do not appear in the white employment register. At Rooiberg, G.H. Behrens, W. Botes and other local Boers (their names were not specified), had contracts to supply timber to the mine, to bring charcoal from the Crocodile River and to operate a twice-weekly mail cart service between the mine and Warmbaths.⁶³

In addition, blacks were employed to 'run' with the company's mail between mines and to the nearest rail link, and to burn charcoal for use in the gas engines which drove the stamp mills. Some black men, women and youths were also employed to plant crops and trees for food and fuel on the companies' farms, and to care for their livestock. There are several references in company records to the planting of syringa, wattle and pepper trees for fuel, and to the use of oxen to haul ore from underground and around the mines, also to the use of donkey carts to carry water.⁶⁴ It seems likely, too, that local Boers and black farmers supplied some of the food requirements for the burgeoning population at the tin mining centres, although mine records do not mention this.

The tin mines thus provided employment for local people as well as the group recruited from outside. This ensured contact between people of various cultures, as well as an increase of currency flowing through the region, both of which had important implications for its socio-economic development. In 1907 it was estimated that some £7 000 was invested in donkeys, wagons, harnesses and other equipment needed by the transport riders. This meant that a fair amount of money was circulating in the northern districts.⁶⁵ This stimulus to the local economy with the arrival of the mines, extended to the nearby towns as well. The Port Elizabeth firm Mosenthals which had a branch in Potgietersrus, began to extend its facilities and to offer equipment and other supplies of the kind needed by people embarking on a different kind of life at one of the tin mining centres. Advertisements in the local newspaper drew attention to 'useful articles for the veldt', for example, 'dungaree trousers, flannel shirts, miners' boots, picks, shovels and tinned provisions of the best quality'. The firm also exploited a growing black consumer market, and began to specialize in 'kaffir truck'. A typical advertisement of the time suggested that 'kafirs appreciate(d) the pains you (took) to aid them in dressing prettily', and that 'flannelette and Oxford shirts, handkerchiefs, ringed mufflers, as well as Belgian cloth and blankets, lustre rugs and shawls', would all be on sale.⁶⁶

Mainly, though, the period from approximately 1905 to 1914 is fascinating for the experiments with labour which took place in the Waterberg. The remote locality of the tin mines meant that the tin-mine owners often solved their problems with a flexibility not possible in the Witwatersrand. Sometimes one man performed many tasks such as serving as compound manager, 'native' time keeper and unofficial mine doctor. It was also apparent that categories of work were not always clearly demarcated on racial grounds. At Rooiberg, for example, between 1912 and 1914, two blacks, Ben Powe, known as the 'blacksmith' and Matches Mashaba, the 'electrician', started performing skilled duties at the mine. Both men had long service records.⁶⁷ On the other hand, at Leeuwpoot in 1914, shortages of unskilled labour were alleviated by the use of poor whites (referred to as 'unskilled Dutch') at black wage rates.⁶⁸ (This payment of unskilled 'black' rates was a point underlined in the company report.)

The companies also resorted to the employment of labour from outside the borders of South Africa, and at various times, Chinese, Herero and Mozambiquan people worked on the tin mines of the Waterberg. The evidence about the

Chinese is incomplete but nevertheless apparent. According to a handwritten report at the time, the manager (a nephew of Dr Leander Starr Jameson), in 1907 solved an immediate labour crisis when his main miner left. He managed to engage someone called Thompson who 'was prepared to do the work in contract with China men' and who then proceeded 'to break a record in shaft sinking with their aid'.⁶⁹

At about the same time Anglo-French, which administered Rooiberg, was instrumental in resettling a tribe of about 500 refugee Herero people from South-West Africa on one of the company's farms, Groenfontein, for the purpose of procuring their labour. Anglo-French was able to organize this 'with the friendly assistance of the Transvaal government'. Although initially reluctant 'to compromise (their) squatter policy and the question of native land tenure, generally, by permitting the company to found a labour colony of its own', the company nonetheless agreed to a compromise. It was decided that Anglo-French should cede to the government the farm Groenfontein at a nominal rental, and that the Herero would pay to the government the usual rent payable by 'natives' occupying Crown Land (£1 per year, per able-bodied male).⁷⁰

The government, in turn, undertook to collect one shilling per month from every adult male and to pay this to Anglo-French. They also undertook to ensure that every adult male worked for four to six months of the year on one of the mines in the Anglo-French group. This symbiotic arrangement between a capitalist company and the Transvaal government was possibly a test case — an experimental labour colony which might indicate the lines along which future labour policy could be worked out. The experiment was apparently not discussed in parliament, but Anglo-French issued a public statement that the Herero settlement might well be a way of 'increasing the supply of working natives' and solving 'the native labour problem' especially since the Chinese had been repatriated.⁷¹

It seems likely that if it had worked, similar projects might have been introduced. However, the experiment was not a success. It lasted for only six years, from January 1907 to December 1912. The Herero failed to adapt to their new environment — their crops failed in the first year and they could not pay their rent. Anglo-French, at the request of the government, agreed to forgo their rent but there was little improvement in subsequent years. Eventually, in 1912, it was decided to break up the settlement because, in the opinion of Anglo-French, the Herero were 'naturally lazy', their leader Samuel Maharero was an alcoholic and they had failed to show adaptability to conditions of mine work.⁷²

Apparently no account was taken of the fact that the

⁶³ See for example RMD, Monthly reports at Rooiberg, Schoch — Way, 10.8.1910 and 17.4.1914. Also *Zoutpansberg Review*, 16.2.1909, 5.3.1909 and 5.7.1910.

⁶⁴ RMD, Weekly report of Manager (Jameson), Rooiberg, to London and South Africa Agency, 19.3.1906; also *South African Tin Mines Report*, 31.12.1910 and African Farms, *Eleventh Report*, 31.12.1912.

⁶⁵ *Zoutpansberg Review*, 8.3.1907.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.3.1907 and 16.2.1909.

⁶⁷ Unlike the white employment register, there is no similar surviving register for blacks. This information has been obtained from interviews with long-serving employees, George Hauptfleisch, Edward Sikili, Alex Matsape, Thomas Moloka and Edwin Gondwe, Rooiberg, 1981.

⁶⁸ *Leeuwpoot (African Farms) Report*, 31.12.1914.

⁶⁹ RMD, Weekly report of Jameson (Rooiberg) to London and South Africa Agency, 12.2.1907.

⁷⁰ Anglo-French, *Tenth Meeting*, 22.4.1908.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, *Thirteenth Meeting*, 30.9.1911 and *ibid.*, *Fourteenth Meeting*, 15.9.1912.

Herero were traditionally a pastoral people, not agriculturalists, and that they had no background of labour on mines. It seems possible too that the land they were given was a marginal farming area, incapable of supporting an agricultural existence on a long-term basis. The fact that the indigenous population was in any case sparse in this area, causing shortages of potential labour, would seem to substantiate this explanation.

Many questions arise about this experiment. It is not clear, for example, why the Herero did not make more impact on the Waterberg, or where they disappeared to. Research needs to be done to understand more fully the dynamics of population patterns in the Waterberg at this time.

Finally and perhaps most successfully, the Rooiberg company resorted to recruiting large numbers of Mozambiquan workers — on one occasion 600 — which must have been almost the full complement of the mine. Company officials pronounced themselves well satisfied with this arrangement and considered the cost, £1 per head, to have been well worth the amount.⁷³ The Mozambiquans were apparently 'obedient and efficient' and they had contributed to 'a marked improvement in the labour position'.⁷⁴ This suggests that not only were there labour shortages, but also problems with the local labour supply. Mozambiquans, as migrants, would presumably have been easier to control than local blacks who could desert easily. At Rooiberg, the manager was given authority to act as a justice of the peace to try petty labour cases, but this was regarded as inadequate and there were frequent requests from the Rooiberg company for police assistance and periodical courts to try cases. All of this suggests labour problems. In 1910 a police post and branch of the Native Affairs Department was established at Olievenbosch (part of the Rooiberg complex), but desertions continued. In 1914, by which time controls were working well

on the Witwatersrand, '50 natives' deserted from Rooiberg, only three of whom were subsequently apprehended,⁷⁵ and Leeuwpoot was 'down to 190 boys' for the same reason.⁷⁶

The particular regionalism of the Waterberg and the difficulties of administering so vast an area, were no doubt the reason that Rooiberg's requests for more adequate police assistance were largely unsuccessful.⁷⁷ At the same time it made other methods possible since it was apparent that control over blacks was sought largely by what Bonner and Shapiro have identified as 'consent'.⁷⁸ Unlike the Witwatersrand, where controls were harsh, on the tin mines fairly informal conditions prevailed. Living quarters were open, there was access to land (company farm land was made available for blacks to grow their own crops),⁷⁹ and families were accommodated and even employed. At Rooiberg, some black women earned 20s. (£1) per month cultivating company land and boys earned between 5s. and 10s. monthly herding company livestock.⁸⁰ It was also apparent that women continued to brew beer on company property long after this had been banned on the Witwatersrand.⁸¹ Ties

⁷³ RMDC, Monthly report at Rooiberg, Schoch — Consulting Engineer (Way), 7.1.1912. See also RMDC, Annual report, 30.6.1912.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ RMDC, Monthly report at Rooiberg, 26.11.1914.

⁷⁶ Leeuwpoot, Weekly and bimonthly reports at Rooiberg, 24.8.1914 and 7.9.1914.

⁷⁷ *Government Gazette of the Union of South Africa*, 21.1.1910.

⁷⁸ P.L. Bonner and R. Shapiro, 'Company estate, company town: Pilgrim's Rest 1910-1932' (unpublished African Studies Institute seminar paper delivered at the University of the Witwatersrand, 19 October 1987).

⁷⁹ See for example *Leeuwpoot (African Farms) Twelfth Annual Report*, 31.12.1913; also *Oceana, Fifteenth Report*, 31.12.1913.

⁸⁰ *Oceana, Fifteenth Report*, 31.12.1913.

⁸¹ TAD, Law Department of Transvaal (LD) 379, AG 1323/03: London and South Africa Agency — Attorney General, 7.10.1928 and 28.10.1928. Also CAD, JUS 30 3/33/10: Manager (Leeuwpoot) — Secretary of Law Department, October 1912.

Smelter at a tin mine in the Rooiberg area.

PHOTOGRAPH: ANDREW LANHAM (BY COURTESY GOLD FIELDS OF SOUTH AFRICA LTD.)



with the old agricultural lifestyle had thus not been completely broken.

Tin mining companies in the Waterberg area clearly anticipated that the provision of appropriate facilities would serve 'to advertise their mines among the natives'. When a successful location was established at Leeuwpoot between 1912 and 1913, 'this attracted sufficient numbers of natives entirely voluntarily... and resulted in the average period of service being noticeably extended'.⁸² Similarly, after a hall had been built in the location at Rooiberg in 1913 to serve as a school and entertainment venue, 'native headmen' apparently indicated that 'their boys were well pleased with conditions offered at the mine'.⁸³ In 1914 it was recorded that 'the mine was very popular with the natives, a large number of whom had settled down permanently with their families'.⁸⁴



Incline shaft at a Rooiberg tin mine.

PHOTOGRAPH: ANDREW LANHAM (BY COURTESY GOLD FIELDS OF SOUTH AFRICA LTD.)

CONCLUSION

The demand for tin and its relative scarcity around the world meant that determined efforts would be made to make a success of mining the deposits found in the Waterberg in 1905. However, the particular regionalism of the Waterberg, transport and communication problems and the unpredictable nature of the tin deposits found there, meant that control over costs and the provision of productive labour conditions would, if anything, be even more important than they were on the Witwatersrand.

Companies did this by a curious mixture of control and consent. The remote localities of the tin mining centres and the distances between them and their relative freedom from government interference, made them virtually autonomous units, exercising a form of control over their white and black populations. The companies decided who could come to their properties to work, trade, or provide services, and they provided the facilities: a hospital, school and recreation hall for whites at Leeuwpoot in 1912 and a hall for blacks there in 1913. A measure of consent was however evident in the higher wages offered whites, the incentive schemes, the opportunities for advancement for blacks and the flexible living arrangements.

The mining areas like Rooiberg were melting pots of interaction and change. But how would one attempt to assess their impact on the Waterberg as a whole? The problem is that the new industrialization was not widespread but rather confined to particular centres remote from each other. Rooiberg, for example, was in many ways a closed community where outsiders were resisted, as evident in 1909, when roads were being built in the area, and the mine was requested to accommodate white road-workers.⁸⁵ It is, perhaps, difficult to call a 'community' a group where there are permanent and semi-permanent members and a variety of ethnic

elements, such as was the case at Rooiberg. Some of the other characteristics associated with the term were indeed evident, for example cross-class supportiveness and co-operation. The artisan blacksmith and the Boer transport rider must have been dependent on each other because the blacksmith made the wagons and harnesses for the transport rider and he shod his horses and mules.⁸⁶ Similarly, blacks must have come to the mines as unskilled workers and learnt their skills from immigrant whites.

However, within the apparent closed community at Rooiberg there were divisions — and these were broadly racial. In an isolated community such as Rooiberg, where of necessity black men learnt and practised skills, it might have been thought that this would have 'nudged' blacks and whites towards social and economic equality.⁸⁷ Certainly skilled blacks must have worked in close co-operation with the white management of the mine, and their skills were crucial to the smooth running of operations. However, the races continued to live apart. Even blacks who had been given responsible jobs at Rooiberg continued to live with other blacks in the location, and the poor whites who did unskilled work at 'black' wage rates at Leeuwpoot in 1914 did not move over to the 'black' side. This suggests that even in an isolated environment where arrangements were, of necessity, often flexible, both whites and blacks had a pre-existing sense of racial exclusivity — and racism was more salient than class interests.

The changes and interaction which took place in the Waterberg, however, were also influenced by the dynamics of class. Pre-capitalist modes of production did not suddenly change to capitalist forms, but classes were forming and there were struggles within them. The dominant class was white, but even within that class there were contradictions, and it was challenged by both black and white underclasses at various times. The Herero did not simply acquiesce in the plan designed for them at Groenfontein, and Boer transport riders, because they felt that their livelihood was threatened, petitioned against the establishment of the Zoutpansberg Railway Construction Association which planned to extend rail links in the area.⁸⁸ So, even though race may seem to stand out as the single most important factor in shaping relations in the Waterberg, it was not the only factor, and the dynamics of both race and class have to be considered.

At centres like Rooiberg, people of various cultures congregated, satisfying various needs and playing a multiplicity of roles. It was possibly at these centres that some of the least class and colour interaction took place; but these centres were remote and isolated from each other, and their implications for the socio-economic development of the wider Waterberg area, remain difficult to assess. The extent of mine labour, labour tenancy, contract labour, arrangements with local farmers and the whole complex issue of race and class relations across the vast, essentially rural, spectrum of the Waterberg needs much further study. □

⁸² *Leeuwpoot (African Farms) Twelfth Annual Report*, 31.12.1913, pp. 44 and 48.

⁸³ RMDC, Half-yearly report at Rooiberg, 30.6.1913.

⁸⁴ RMDC, Monthly report at Rooiberg, 30.6.1914.

⁸⁵ CAD, JUS 527 6420/29: Jameson — District Commandant, Transvaal Police, Rustenburg, 26.2.1909.

⁸⁶ See, for example, *South African Tin Mines Report*, 31.12.1910, p. 11.

⁸⁷ C. van Onselen, 'Race and class in the South African countryside: cultural osmosis and social relations in the sharecropping economy of the south-western Transvaal: 1900-1950' (unpublished African Studies Institute seminar paper delivered at the University of the Witwatersrand, 1 August 1988).

⁸⁸ *Zoutpansberg Review*, 24.12.1907 and 28.5.1908.